

The Palestinian Crisis and the Search for a Road Towards Liberation

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Saturday 9 of June: the Ireland-Palestine Solidarity Campaign organised a march to mark the 40th anniversary of the Six-Day war. An enthusiastic crowd of around 1,000 people marched through the streets of Dublin chanting loud and clear “Free, Free Palestine”. As usual, the Workers Solidarity Movement was there, expressing its uncompromising position of opposing any military occupation and standing by the side of the oppressed. After the march, we gathered in O’Connell street to listen to the impassionate speeches of Raymond Deane, Himat Ajjuri, Dr. Bassam Al-Nasr, Margaretta D’Arcy and Saed Abu Hijleh, whose final speech touched like fire everyone’s heart.

But as we went marching a different story was being told in Gaza: at that very moment, **a bitter conflict was being held between Hamas and Fatah**, in which after six days Fatah was defeated and Hamas took control over the Gaza Strip on the 14th of June. All of the Western media, biased as usual, portrayed events as Hamas coup while deciding to ignore the facts behind them.

The fact is that Hamas, whether the US-Israel block like it or not, was elected by a majority in the legislative elections of January 2006. **Since then, the US-Israel block has been as unwilling to accept this result as the defeated Fatah clique.** Despite all their platitudes about democracy, little counts what the Palestinians themselves expressed to be their option. So they decided to boycott internationally the new government and Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh, what the EU slavishly followed suit as usual, and decided to start an effort to cripple even more Palestinian economy –this, by not delivering any of the promised aid by the EU and by Israel illegally retaining Palestinian tax money that now amounts up to U\$700 million. The argument given for this was that Hamas was a terrorist organisation, in spite of the fact that for the last two years they have not carried a single suicide bombing and observed previous to their election a one-year unilateral truce.

Mahmud Abbas (Abu Mazen) the Palestinian president and head of Fatah was compliant with this policy, making impossible any sort of agreement with Hamas, despite the latter repeated efforts to reach some sort of middle ground, **while his militias carried a systematic campaign of terror, abduction, kidnapping and provocations against Hamas.** The idea behind this was to provoke civil war and that way stage a coup against Hamas. This campaign was lead by

the infamous thug called Muhammad Dahlan and at all times they were financed and encouraged by the US –always more willing to spend its taxpayers money in destabilizing a country than in humanitarian aid. Tactics similar to this had been applied by the US elsewhere, and this time they backfired for the thuggery and murderous behaviour of Dahlan’s men was deeply resented by Gazans. The straw that broke the camel’s back was the attempt to stage a coup by Dahlan’s gang, which bombed Haniyeh’s house in Gaza. After that, Hamas was quick to react and after some days they routed the demoralized US-financed militias of Fatah. The fact that during the crisis Abu Mazen was unable to rally any sort of Palestinian popular support, but relied exclusively on the US-Israeli approval and that of corrupt and puppet regimes ad Egypt and Jordan, is very telling.

The US-Israel block is quite keen to name and shame Syria as being behind every single event in Lebanon. Indeed, a lot of nerve is needed to do so since its own role in the region is ten times worse. Despite the media talking about a civil war, **what we had was a war by proxies between the US-Israel’s dummies and a political force that have opted for resistance.** While Fatah has been tamed, Hamas has been opposing resistance to the continued Israeli onslaught against Palestinians. This was reflected in the two defeats of Fatah: first, in the polls, secondly, on the street fighting of June.

The recent events have to be seen in a broader light to be fully understood:

- **First, it’s the fact of the lingering injustice against Palestinians that Fatah has been trying to administer for their own benefit.** Israel has been defended by the Western media as being a beacon of democracy in the Middle East. Yet, it is a country that was founded on terrorism (does the names of Irgun and Lehin ring a bell?) and on ethnic cleansing of Palestinians, back in 1948 –so it is not the case that it all “went wrong” in 1967. It is a State based on a particular religious identity that treats its non-Jewish citizens as second class. It has undermined any possibility of a peaceful solution and has not kept its word on the Oslo agreements. It is a highly militarised society, where dissent is met with hysteria, as our comrades from Anarchist the Wall can tell. And finally, it has undermined any attempt to build a proper democracy in the Palestinian occupied territories –which are, de facto, part of Israel and where human rights abuses occur on a daily basis. A society that isolates human beings behind walls can be considered as nothing short of criminal. A nuclear country that imprisons dissent, as Vanunu and Tahima can only be a beacon of authoritarianism. Democracy me arse.
- **Secondly, the increasingly deteriorating situation of the Palestinian people who have repeatedly become displaced, second-class citizens under occupation and refugees.** The fighting in the Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon show that Palestinian life is becoming increasingly “cheap” and neglected. The increasingly Apartheid-like turn of the Israeli society is further proof of that, and can be corroborated by reading a recent interview with the ex-US president Jimmy Carter –by no means an anarchist- who states clearly that Israel is an Apartheid state and even worse. *“In some ways it is worse...”* he said, *“Inside Palestine you’ve got enclaves of exclusively Israeli people. The Palestinians are excluded. You’ve got roadblocks so that any movement anywhere in the West Bank is impeded (...) You’ve got a wall that’s been built that goes deep into the West Bank to carve out additional property that belongs to the Palestinians and put it on the Israeli side. They can’t get*

to their own fields. You never had a wall built in South Africa. (...) Palestinians are looked upon as pariahs, as terrorists in their own land” (Irish Times, 19 June). And yet, Israel is fully backed by the European Union while their victims are demonised and punished with sanctions.

- **A third fact is the domestication of the Palestinian liberation movement, specifically, of its dominant wing Fatah, after the Oslo accords of 1993.** These accords formed the Palestinian Authority, quite a misleading name since its nothing but a meaningless institution under the ultimate sovereignty of the Israeli State. Through this, the US-Israeli block could create the illusion of a government and give to the Palestinian leadership all the responsibilities of a government, with none of its advantages. To sum up the result of this was, through all sort of blackmail and through the stick and carrot approach, to turn the Palestinian leadership into a police force to curb down resistance. Thus, Fatah led the Palestinian people from defeat to defeat, trying to turn resistance into mendacity. All this, while Israel completely ignored all of its agreements, and stepped up the construction of settlements, kept going on as usual with their punitive actions with absolute disregard for Palestinian life and started constructing the so-called Apartheid wall (though South Africa did not go that far, in fairness). And yet, surprise, surprise, they got away with all this with no energetic response from the “International Community”. No sanctions, no boycott, no embargo as the Palestinian people have had to endure since a year and a half for voicing their independent opinion.
- A fourth fact is that, not only the Oslo accords served to compromise Palestinian struggle without changing in any way Israeli intransigence, but they “*transformed the Palestinian revolutionary project into a corrupted comprador class that enjoys some benefits from the occupier. The victory of Hamas in the elections has caught this comprador class by surprise (...) The reality of Palestinians killing each other over a meaningless authority (...) is tragic*” (“Oslo’s baleful legacy”, Nimer Sultany, Electronic Intifada 16 June). Therefore, **a new status quo has been created in the Palestinian leadership that, objectively, and as long as they get the goods from the occupation, is not willing to challenge it in anyway.** This is where Abu Mazen’s slavish and subservient attitude to its Israeli and US masters lay, turning Fatah into an instrument of the occupation, into a puppet of the US-Israel block.
- **A fifth fact is constituted by the undeniable decline of the US as the sole world super-power, what certainly has repercussions for its satellites all over the world.** The crisis that was first expressed in economical and then in political-diplomatic terms, is now clearly expressed in military terms, with their inability to overpower resistance in Afghanistan and Iraq. Adding insult to injury, Iran is openly giving its two fingers to Washington by pushing forward its nuclear programme. This crisis is further deepened by last year’s humiliation of the Israeli armed forces in the Israel-Hizbullah war, suffering a major and sound defeat of huge repercussions. The “New Middle East” that Bush dreamt of is nowhere to be seen; instead, there’s effectively an unstable scenario in which the US-Israeli block has been steadily losing ground and initiative: the events in Lebanon, the new prominence of Iran and Syria in the regional politics, the growing unrest in puppet-regimes like those of Mubarak’s Egypt or Musharraf’s Pakistan, the continuing insurgence in Iraq

and Afghanistan, even the increasing criticisms of Hamid Karzai in Afghanistan against the indiscriminate killing of civilians by the occupation forces, all stands as proof that the US-Israel project for the Middle East is in a serious crisis. This crisis makes it all too clear that resistance is a viable alternative, no matter how difficult the task might seem in a sealed Gaza strip. Irrespective of the hard conditions imposed by the further isolation of Hamas in Gaza, they know quite well that, overall, they are not necessarily in a position of relative weakness and Ismail Haniyeh could declare openly on the 24th that the **ONLY** way for Palestinians is resistance, in sharp contrast with Abu Mazen's readiness to always reach new lows in negotiations.

- The last fact is that, because of this increasing resistance and relative weakness in the global scenario, **the US-Israel block finds itself in a desperate situation, and just like any other desperate power, will be quite willing to resort to all kinds of atrocities and overwhelming use of force.**

So the defeat of Fatah cannot be seen merely as just an episode in the bitter recent history of the Palestinian people, but as a partial defeat of the Bush policy in the Middle East – I stress partial, for the Palestinians keep divided, for the Oslo agreement is still in place, for the Palestinian Authority is still the “mould” for both Gaza and the West Bank. The current partition of Palestine into a “Hamastan” in Gaza and a “Fatahstan” in the West Bank is quite functional to the occupation and to the long-term interests of the US-Israel dominant block. By dividing and isolating the already divided and isolated Palestinian people even more, Zionism gets it easier to control, punish and prolong the existence of its Apartheid State. **The current situation, while definitely a blow into this neo-colonialist block, cannot be kept forever and needs to be resolved in a way that permits unity of action and a common basic programme for the people to struggle for.**

The US-Israel block understands this quite well, and threw their full weight in support of Abu Mazen and Fatah, the Palestinian “good boys”. Promises of lifting the roadblocks in the West Bank, of delivering the illegally held tax paid by the Palestinians (both in Gaza and the West Bank) only to the West Bank, fresh promises of military assistance and training to Abu Mazen's thugs, of renewing financial aid, even of freeing some Fatah prisoners have been made by the US-Israel block and its puppet Arab allies. All this while Gaza is isolated and punished with the complicity of Abu Mazen, who illegally dismissed Haniyeh, formed a new cabinet headed by Salam Fayyad, a pro-US economist with links to the IMF (whose Third Way Part gained only 2.4% of votes in the elections Hamas won), started attacking Hamas activists in the West Bank and has called for a boycott against Gaza, even going as far as to invalidate Palestinian passports last week to re-issue valid ones only in the West Bank. Thus, **Abu Mazen is contributing to deepening the misery and isolation of Gaza, what is obviously praised in Tel Aviv and Washington, but what represents a time bomb in the making in Palestine.**

The role of the EU in this crisis has been absolutely shameful. Again in the words of Jimmy Carter, “*the EU has been subservient, accommodating to the policies of Israel and the US in persecuting the Palestinian people because the way they voted in January last year*”. As expected, they threw their weight behind Abu Mazen, as well. It is worth noting that, given the new composition of the EU, headed by Merkel, with bigots such as Sarkozy in power, and with some influence from the furiously pro-US Eastern European countries, such a subservient role is only natural.

The EU seems to represent, in the eyes of many, an alternative “democratic” pole among the world powers to the US, a country that has proved to disregard democracy and human rights when its interests are at stake. Well, the recent events provide further evidence of the naivety of this claim: **the EU has been no better than the US-Israeli block** and has given its full support to a *de facto* government which cabinet is headed by someone who failed to obtain more than 2.4% of votes, while the elected Prime Minister is rejected by the “international community”. That’s democracy *a la* US-Israel-Europe!

This shows, as well, the complete disregard for what the Palestinians have to say about their own affairs. The most popular party among Palestinians (Hamas) has been completely boycotted by foreign powers, while the least popular party has been accepted as valid government. Again, let’s us note the fact that **Abu Mazen is not able to rally popular support from Palestinians but rely exclusively on the “international community”**. Thus, he’s getting increasingly isolated from the Palestinians and he’s seen more and more for what he really is: as a collaborator and a tool in the hands of the occupier. Those imperialist powers, who endorse Abu Mazen, forget that whatever base of support Fatah still has is composed by Palestinian people and as such, are likely to get more and more disaffected with the turn of the situation. The traditional Palestinian leadership is more discredited than ever.

Hamas, on their side, has reacted by insisting on the failed formula of a “National Unity” government. This might be proof of their goodwill in the face of this impasse, but completely fails to understand the mercenary role of Fatah in the current Palestinian crisis as well as the hollowness of the Palestinian Authority, to which they still cling as it had any meaning at all. This is only the management of misery and occupation. **The Palestinian Authority has not helped to advance the cause of Palestinian liberation a single inch. Worse than that, it has become a major hindrance and it is now a divisive factor that turned the Palestinian struggle inwards.** Therefore its use should be questioned and rejected by those who sincerely want to see a free Palestine. As someone even pointed out, the dismantlement of the Palestinian Authority would even pass the burden of the occupation to Israel instead of Europe –what could “renew” interest in solving this problem for good. Anyway, to insist on the Oslo accords, at this stage of the game, equals to naivety, bad faith or, plain and simple, political illiteracy.

On the other hand, the conflict has been reduced to the struggle for hegemony between rival armed wings. And yet again, popular resistance does exist in far more ways than armed factions and beyond this or that particular leader. The experience of any liberation war shows us that the decisive factor is never the military aspect: what decides victory is always the people. **The collapse of the “National Unity” government, that was never intended really to take off, should open the doors to radically re-think the struggle of the Palestinian people (instead of just getting the “leaders” to talk once again) and thus provide a chance to rebuild, from the grassroots, a popular movement of masses** that will be able to challenge the Merkava tanks and the heinous aggression of Zionism much better than thousands of Qassam missiles.

From our end, the international left –or actually anyone with the slight interest in the fate of human beings- needs to seriously acknowledge the graveness of the recent events in Palestine and the importance of gathering support against the criminal policies being pushed forward by the US-Israel block and obediently followed by the EU. **We have to create a movement aiming to stop the funding by the EU of a Civil War: that’s what the current embargo to Gaza**

and the financial aid to Abu Mazen means, in short. We have to push forward the boycott of Israel at different levels, as it was done in the '80s against South Africa.

Finally, a recent article by Ilan Pappé tell us that: *“There are quite a few Jewish mothers and wives in the Gaza Strip — some sources within Gaza say up to 2000 — married to local Palestinians and parents to their children. There are many more Jewish women who married Palestinians in the Palestine countryside. An act of desegregation that both political elites find difficult to admit, digest or acknowledge. If despite the colonization, occupation, genocidal policies and dispossession such harmonies of love and affection were possible, imagine what could happen if these criminal policies and ideologies would disappear”* (“Towards a Geography of Peace: Whither Gaza?” Electronic Lebanon, 18 June 2007). In a similar fashion, Palestinian and Israeli people have been carrying on a joint struggle in Bil'in against the separation fence there for almost three years. This is inspiring indeed and shows that, against all odds, unity for a just cause is possible and that a two, three or more State solution is not only undesirable; it is not necessary. People can live together, can work together and should do so. **An alternative Palestine, built from the grassroots, with room for everyone, is clearly shown as a way forward by this example.**

In the face of the current difficulties, resistance may seem a titanic task. But the Palestinian people have shown their greatness and resilience in the past. It is up to us to show them that they do not stand alone in their just struggle. It is up to us to keep chanting “Free, Free Palestine”. Those who think that they'll break the will to struggle through black mail, through carrot and stick, through hunger forget the fact that, **as very few people in the world, the Palestinian people literally have nothing to lose but their chains.**

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ahead and the responsibility of the international solidarity movement.

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